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ABSTRACT

To help educators improve their school public relations program, this handbook discusses how to develop an internal school communications program. Chapter 1 explains that schools need effective internal communications systems because school employees are important in communicating with the public. Chapter 2 covers the development of a strong internal communications system. Stressing the need for two-way communication, the chapter identifies a school's internal publics, recommends school board policies on internal communications, suggests promoting interpersonal activities among employees, outlines improved telephone and written communications methods, supports using staff newsletters, emphasizes the need for employee involvement, notes the administrator's role in ensuring good internal communications, suggests ways to hear staff concerns and to involve employees (for instance, through employee advisory committees, staff meetings, or inservice training sessions), presents guidelines for a crisis communications plan, and urges recognition of employee performance and accomplishments. Chapter 3 discusses the evaluation of internal communications programs. Chapter 4's brief summary of the handbook precedes the five appendices, which include a sample board policy, a sample employee recognition certificate, and a district communications model. (RW)

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BASIC SCHOOL PR KIT

BASIC SCHOOL PR GUIDE

Internal Communications

EA 015 235

One in a series of eight school public relations guides which contain concise, tested and practical ideas.

National School Public Relations Association

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Introduction

NSPRA's **Basic School PR Kit,** of which this guide is a part, is designed to provide specific, practical help for educators in starting or improving school PR programs. The Kit has been developed in response to the hundreds of requests for help NSPRA receives each year. Material on vital public relations topics is presented in the most concise, usable format possible.

The basic concept of public relations is explained on cassette tape by Edward L. Bernays, the man who pioneered the field of public relations in the 1920s. Important school PR topics are covered in detail in eight tightly-written guides. Additional materials are included in a resource packet containing public relations standards, proven ideas that work, and a PR planning guide and worksheet.

Altogether, the **Basic School PR Kit** is a short course in school PR fundamentals, a refresher for existing programs, a ready reference for dealing with problems that arise and a resource for anyone working to build public confidence in education.

This guide, *Internal Communications,* tells you how to plan an internal communications program that will improve the image of your district with steps for identifying publics, establishing policies, program goals, inservice programs and involving the staff in decision-making. Those that work in the schools—the total "school family"—are considered the most reliable source of information about their schools. These internal publics are a major influence on communities' attitudes about schools.

Author of this guide is **Bonnie Ellison,** (NSPRA Accredited), Public Information Director, Northside Independent School District, San Antonio, Texas.

This Kit was developed by John H. Wherry, executive director of the National School Public Relations Association, and Virginia M. Ross, director of school communication services, who edited the material. It was produced by Kim F. Hasten, manager of editorial and production services, with special technical and production assistance provided by Barbara Acosta, Jean Berger, Judi Cowan, Mary Ann Johnson and Norma Meyer. The graphics in the Kit were developed by Susan R. Eason of Eason and Associates and Kim F. Hasten.

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Chapter 1
Schools Need Effective Internal Communications

Who's running the nation's schools? The people. Still, in the 1980s just as they did a century ago. People in the '80s elect boards of education to select administrators who in turn hire teachers, school bus drivers, cooks, custodians and numerous other employees. Among the same electorate are the selected school employees themselves.

In America's past most people had some knowledge of what was occurring in public education. Or they knew to ask a neighbor or relative considered an expert by virtue of his/her workplace; the school bus maintenance foreman next door or the sister-in-law in the school district's personnel office. For the most part, this communication system worked well.

But people became busier. There was no longer time to pay as much attention to schools. Actually, the schools proved helpful in the new time crunch. Educators took on jobs as diverse as serving breakfast at school, taking children to view oil drilling rigs or automotive assembly plants, rationing homework. Education was, after all, the **educator's job.** As education became increasingly complex, however, people again began to ask questions. And they still asked school employees. This was convenient since more people than ever before work now for the school systems.

But in the 1980s, people who formerly had answers—those who work in the schools—don't always have them. More and more school employees seem unwilling or unable to find answers, or their answers are wrong. It appears that the time-honored school communication system isn't working right. Something's amiss.

When people have questions about education today, who will answer? How will communities decide who should be held responsible for solving school problems? How will governance be determined?

The answers to complex—and simplistic—education ques-

tions today depend on school administrators. Community members themselves, school administrators recognize the impact school employees have on community attitudes. School staff members, who may also be parents and taxpayers, often have the most questions; about their children and tax money, but also about their jobs. Whether granted "expert" status by community consensus, or self-styled, **school system employees wield real communications "clout."**

It is easy to account for good schools. When schools are good, employees share community pride and accept community praise for their part in it. Informed employees are satisfied. The more satisfied, the more effective, and vice versa. Positive results and effective job performance generate confidence in people's ability to handle their problems. In such an atmosphere, change can be effected and criticism met from an offensive, rather than defensive, position.

Attempts to account for school systems with more weaknesses than strengths forbode trouble and get worse. Administrators who neglect employee communications responsibilities begin to hear grumbles from inside—and, ultimately, outside. Troubled employees don't concentrate on job performance. Employee failures become employers' problems and may also be the employers' fault. Drawn into such a situation, children and their education encounter trouble. And society suffers as well.

George H. Gallup, putting his annual yardstick to schools in the 11th Annual Gallup Poll at the turn of the decade (1979), found people apparently willing to wait and see what school administrators in the '80s would do about filling existing internal and external communications gaps. A downtrend in support for public education and in the public's perception of its quality, consistent since 1974, was temporarily halted in 1979.

Now is a good time to bring the "school family" together and discuss seriously where we go from here in attempts to maintain or improve upon American education. People—educators and lay people alike—have a right, need and desire to influence education in the future—to participate in educational decisions.

The following internal communications guide provides effective techniques to turn school employer-employee relations "inside out."

Chapter 2
Building Strong Internal Communications Systems

Planning a school internal relations program begins with "assumption and presumption analysis." Public education is so public, everyone knows something about how schools operate, whether or not problems exist, and what's happening at school. Everyone forms opinions about whether education is good or bad, getting better or worse.

Public school employees are the second-largest work force in America (government employees are first). School employees are also citizens deciding what to do about education in their own communities. Whether or not they and their neighbors support the system and cooperate to solve its problems, sustain and improve it, depends on facts they know or don't know—**and how they feel about the facts.**

Two-Way Communication Builds Support

School administrators are responsible for providing the impetus for effective employee communications and job performance. This is not just a book on how to begin, continue or improve internal communication programs. It is a guide for the superintendent, science department chairman, shop foreman, or PR person. The biggest and most important part of any school leader's job is producing cooperation between people that results in achievement of district public education goals.

Too many administrators **assume** school employees are informed, without knowing for sure. Certainly internal communications systems exist. But to be effective, they must be planned, implemented, and evaluated. Unplanned internal communications systems are grapevines bearing rumor, speculation, inaccuracy, and frequently, misinformation.

Many school administrators "assume" everyone working at

school supports the program, has the same information and, therefore, shares similar feelings. Administrators "assume" staff members who do not know will take it upon themselves to find out. It's become painfully apparent since the first teacher's union was organized, the first strike, struck, that not everyone working at school supports the program.

Administrators can assume correctly, however, two positive points:

1. Employers already have or can secure employees' attention quicker and more easily than they can obtain outsiders' attention. (People are rarely apathetic about their livelihood!)
2. Employers and employees speak the same language. Administrators' ideas are neither new nor foreign to staff members.

In some respects, internal and external communications obligations and methods are the same. Both must satisfy a human need to know, and give participants opportunities to be heard, make suggestions and influence decisions. Both are more successful when designed to recognize and reward achievement.

Depending on the topic, however, employees may need to know more than others. Although the community needs to know about the salaries their tax money pays, employees need to know pay dates, check stub code designations, and payroll office procedures. Occasionally, employees may need less information than other publics. **But don't make this assumption until certain.** For example, school calendars can be supplied frequently and in many forms to parents. But since employees pay meticulous attention to workdays and holidays, they need less frequent calendar reminders. While parents and taxpayers are still uncomfortable with the term "K-12," and need administrators to say "kindergarten through twelfth grade," employees probably understand the abbreviation.

Identifying Internal Publics

A first step in developing your internal communication plan is to identify the many different **internal publics** in the school system. Note how groups interrelate and overlap, and specify the various and changing needs of each. Make plans for communications between groups: from one to another and back again, up and down the organizational chart as well as horizontally across a

single group. When administrators know well and understand different audience needs, various avenues for communication can be selected. Use an appropriate communication vehicle for each group. The medium, whether audio-visual, written, or face-to-face, depends on the specific groups or publics and the topic.

Internal publics can include:

- school board members
- administrators, supervisors
- counselors (guidance, vocational, handicapped)
- librarians and library aides
- teachers, substitute and intern teachers
- educational diagnosticians, school psychologists
- school nurses and doctors
- educational secretaries, clerks, clerical aides
- classroom aides and regular volunteers
- custodians
- cafeteria personnel
- bus drivers, bus maintenance personnel
- plant maintenance crew members and craftsmen
- students (full or part-time employees; regular schedule, night school, and adult education)
- ombudsmen, social workers, probation, attendance, truant and immigration officers
- lawyers, financial advisors, consultants
- contracted personnel (computer programmers, graphic artists, printers)

School board members are "lay people" with a voter mandate to become informed. A strong superintendent with a well-planned internal communications program can effectively represent the staff to the board, the board to staff. It helps to provide opportunities (during board meetings, school programs) for dialogue between board members and employees. (Inviting staff to report to the board helps them to look objectively at their jobs and provides leadership training and satisfaction.) Board member visits to schools and offices should be encouraged.

Students daily influence attitudes about education and form their own. They grow up to be decision-making adults. Provide opportunities (student advisory committees, "Meet the Press" sessions in which students interview teachers, administrators) for students to contribute to education planning and to practice being adults. Teach students **about** school **at** school: governance, funding, organization. Also teach students that education is a career field worth pursuing upon graduation.

Recognize the **silent majority.** While some individuals or employee groups seem always to be suing, marching, picketing, lobbying and proclaiming, most report for work, do their jobs, and go home. Don't spend a majority of your time on a minority of people. Silent staff members, almost always a source of support, can quickly become disenchanted if they are taken for granted.

Develop Sound Communication Policies

Internal communications programs begin with a commitment to communicate and formal adoption of district communications policies. National and state laws affecting education have communications components. For example, you would, according to Texas laws, not only adhere to equal employment practices, but also "disseminate information about said adherence to recipients of said practices."

Locally-adopted board policies on internal communications should spell out the district's intent (1) to include employees as an integral part of the school system and as such, an integral part of the school communication system, (2) the worthiness of this intent, and (3) methods by which to implement and operate a program which includes employee participation in a two-way communication network. (See Sample board policy on internal communications in Appendix A.)

Interpersonal Activities

Since employees spend the biggest part of each day at work, their fellow employees are often their best friends, with whom they share accomplishments and problems at work and after hours. School administrators who provide opportunities for employees to develop this normal relationship reap rewards in job performance. Take time during staff meetings to organize a staff tennis league, jogging club or inter-office bowling league. Let employees use school facilities after hours for arts and crafts or physical fitness classes. Suggest employees take turns bringing refreshments to the staff lounge and use the school mimeograph machine for a recipe exchange. In one school, inflation-minded staff members recently organized a vegetable co-op and secured permission to have produce trucks make deliveries before school.

People often respond favorably to nostalgia trips, such as ice cream socials, bike hikes or Monopoly tournaments. Ask staff members what they miss about the good old days and plan extra-curricular activities to resurrect them.

Employee relations activities which can be categorized as interpersonal succeed best when initiated by staff members themselves or based on an accurate understanding of what staff members want. Surveys of staff desires take many forms and may be formal or informal. As with any research, keep in mind that attitudes change quickly and vary from one group to another. (See Appendix B.)

When communicating with employees, ask for their opinions, and follow-up with a report back to them specifying the results of the inquiry.

A sample survey for inquiring about staff desires follows:

Place in priority order what is most important to you in your job.

1. Full appreciation of work done
2. Feeling "in" on things
3. Sympathetic help on personal problems
4. Job security
5. Good wages
6. Work that keeps you interested
7. Promotion and growth in the system
8. Personal loyalty to workers
9. Good working conditions
10. Tactful disciplining

(From management consultants Zacharias and Assoc., Omaha, Neb. as reported in *The Ragan Report.*)

When using internal communications to change people's attitudes, study how opinions are formed and minds set. How do teachers categorize central office types? Are custodians as a group lumped and discriminated against accordingly? Do "specialists" have shorter hours? Whether or not they actually do, are opinions to this effect being confirmed by actions? Avoid terms like "specialist" altogether when you can. Avoid the term "non-professional" staff. How can management expect non-professionals to act otherwise? NSPRA recommends the terms "professional" and "professional support staff" be used.

Psychology Today, Advertising Age and similar publications, and research (produced primarily by private enterprise, employee relations consultants) provide human relations resource materials on such current topics as job stress. By keeping up-to-date with

modern employee relations trends, administrators can anticipate problems and take steps to prevent them from occurring. Many districts are now providing inservice training sessions in these areas for the total school family.

When to Talk, When to Listen, and When to Write It Down

Happy mediums between too much talk, dead silence, and properly selecting vehicles to communicate effectively are struck when all are tried and results are objectively evaluated.

TELEPHONE COMMUNICATIONS

1. All employees will benefit from proper telephone etiquette training. Telephone companies have excellent programs on the subject—usually free.
2. Imposing strict rules **against** transferring calls improves internal communications. Teach staff members to say "I don't know but I'll find out and call back." This way (1) the employee gets the caller's name, phone number and inquiry logged for future reference, (2) the caller is neither inconvenienced nor convinced of incompetence by being transferred to several other departments who also "don't know but will transfer," and (3) the employee who doesn't know finds out, which results in at least one more employee better-informed after the inquiry than before. (Exceptions to the rule may be made when you are confident calls will be handled after the transfer to the right person is completed. Inquirers reluctant to leave a name and number must be handled differently.)
3. Recorded telephone messages are useful—on business phones after hours, and as 24-hour news briefs or hot lines. Update recorded messages regularly.

WRITTEN COMMUNICATIONS

1. Send copies of memos to all people who might eventually be affected.
2. Photocopied pictures on memos and bulletins provide simple, effective graphics.
3. Employees appreciate receiving copies of information prepared for other audiences.

4. Instruct staff in the use of a school system communications style book.

5. Maximize use of paycheck stuffers, student newspapers, annual reports for internal as well as external communications.

STAFF NEWSLETTERS

(Includes contributions by Barbara A. Polly Ondrasik, Editor, MCPS BULLETIN, Montgomery County (Md.), and Patty Williamson, Ritenour School District, Overland (Mo.), Director of Public Relations.)

Regular staff newsletters enable all school system employees to serve as the information sources "outsiders" expect them to be. The editor has only to publish a timely newsletter written and designed to encourage employee readership. Because frequent distribution is imperative so employees have the information first, keep it short (one page is fine), simple, and print it in-house. (See Appendix C.)

Internal newsletters are effective tools to make announcements (job changes, deadlines pending, calendar), publicize promising instructional practices, communicate important administrative decisions, explain cause and effects of events, and recognize outstanding employee contributions to education.

Involve Employees in Setting Goals

To develop an internal communications program you may want to establish a committee composed of representatives of each identified employee group. The committee's assignment: to determine needs and set priorities. This advisory committee should meet regularly to evaluate program effectiveness, contribute ideas and rearrange priorities.

Internal communications program goals will be different for different school systems and some will be more detailed than others, but essential elements are:

1. To establish methods for determining employee needs.
2. To explain employment practices.
3. To provide for employee contributions to decision-making.
4. To provide guidelines for recognition and reward.
5. To communicate national and local education trends.

TIPS ON NEWSLETTERS:

1. Photograph people any other way besides "mug" shots. Use lots of photos if you can afford to. Afterwards, send pictures to schools for bulletin boards or give them to the people pictured.

2. Invite staff members to submit articles, questions, and letters to the editor.

3. Report on employees' before-and-after-work problems: "How I Conquer Freeway Boredom," "Where I Go to Unwind."

4. Be "fashionable," current. Ask retiring employees "how times have changed."

5. Print specific details. Don't say "The board approved the carpet bid." Say which schools or offices will be carpeted, when, and why.

6. Use lots of names. (As quotes, though, not as lengthy lists.)

7. Offer solutions to problems. Discuss failure openly to secure involvement.

8. Distribute copies to every employee.

9. Check and recheck news stories for accuracy. When mistakes occur, print corrections in the next earliest issue.

10. Avoid heavy-handed editorializing by administrators. Avoid jargon.

11. Keep "The Superintendent's Message" out entirely or at least off the front page.

12. Design articles for "gleaning" as well as in-depth reading. Use long headlines which tell the entire story in one statement.

13. Balance coverage between schools, offices, and employee groups.

14. Write about the entire school board, not just the board president.

15. Invent continuing columns: Unsung Heroes, People Poll.

16. Conduct readership surveys and write and edit to meet staff information needs.

"AN OUNCE OF INVOLVEMENT IS WORTH A TON OF PAMPHLETS"

When setting program priorities, place involvement first. Programs which emphasize involvement are less expensive, less time-consuming for everyone, and more successful—regardless of school system size.

The Administrator's Role is to INSURE that Internal Communication Occurs

The school administrator is the key figure in planning and implementing internal communications. Supervisors must (1) include all employees; (2) apply a management-by-objectives approach to developing goals and carrying out programs; and (3) approach employee relations from a positive point of view.

To produce effective internal communications, skillful administrators will:

1. Become a teacher of teachers.
2. Live—don't just print and tout—a code of ethics which meets or exceeds existing employee standards.
3. Encourage constant two-way communication.
4. Explain "why and when" news will be forthcoming when there's no news.
5. Approach problem-solving creatively. Be flexible.
6. Apply common sense, a sense of fairness (integrity and honesty), and a sense of humor.
7. Repeat yourself often. (After 30 days people recall 20% of what they have learned. Dr. James Deese, *The Psychology of Learning*)
8. Risk offending.

An effective administrator must understand motivation, and motivate. Effective motivation techniques will help school employees do a good job and be proud of doing it. Employees want jobs and bosses to offer "fulfillment." Today, more and more people work for the "good feeling they get for having done a job well." (See Appendix D.)

Review and Revise Employment Practices

Because you never get a second chance to make a good first impression, personnel recruiting and hiring practices deserve a great deal of attention.

Design a recruiting booklet for personnel officers to distribute on college campuses and mail to prospects. This may be a brochure printed (and paid for) in cooperation with a local chamber of commerce or visitor's bureau. Some districts place scrapbooks and portfolios of charts and photographs in personnel office waiting rooms.

Recruiting practices may reflect an entire school system "image" modeled after advertising campaigns: "We're Number One" (Hertz) or "We Try Harder" (Avis). Spring Branch School District (Houston, Texas) projects a positive image with a combination poster-fact sheet: "Since you can't beat our school system, why not join it?" Other effective slogans are:

"Some of the Best People Work for Northside School District"
"Join an Exclusive Club, Join Northside"
"Northside: Putting First Things First"
"Live and Learn in Northside School District"
"Kevin and Betsy are Two Good Reasons You'll Like Working Here—Their Classmates are 18,000 More"

Though personnel officers can't guarantee new staff members they will have a good day every day, they can use the hiring process to explain the district's internal communications system and invite involvement. Administrators who welcome dialogue with newcomers from the beginning, profit from new ideas throughout.

Let new employees know you will be placing copies of news clippings, awards and commendation letters in their personnel file. Build a library of master's theses and doctoral dissertations written by employees. Recruits will know from the start the value you place on job performance and continuing education.

As soon as an employee is hired, arrange a welcome. This may be in the form of a new teachers' reception, an orientation program, staff assignment of a "buddy" to introduce them to their surroundings and co-workers, a "new faces" bulletin board with names and Polaroid pictures, or a letter from the superintendent expressing enthusiasm about the appointment. (When bulletin boards are changed, give the photos to the people in the picture.)

Provide new staff members as much information as possible about the school system's goals, internal communications program, employee duties and responsibilities, and the district's view of their particular job in the overall scheme. But don't overwhelm newcomers with stacks of written materials. Conduct new staff orientation in an informal setting with small groups. Explain personnel policies and "teach" the handbook and job description with audio-visual presentations, workshops and rap sessions. Left alone, new staff members will be too busy beginning the new job to study. Given opportunities for discussion, however, people raise questions, obtain answers and learn the value of your written materials as a resource.

Explain contracts to employees to they know what they are signing. Explain employer **and** employee contract compliance obligations. Don't threaten staff with the consequences of non-compliance, but discuss the subject.

Provide Opportunities to Hear Staff Concerns

Adopt a staff evaluation system which is meaningful and fair. Administrators who treat employees fairly in evaluation processes can expect fair treatment in return.

Don't let the evaluation process become impotent. Turn it into a learning situation. If one approach to problem-solving doesn't work, try another. Involve employees in self-improvement by asking them to develop personal short and long term goals. Provide counseling for employees whose conduct is below standard. Be consistent. Don't allow infractions by some employees and deny others.

Employee Involvement: An Invitation or an Order?

Whether staff involvement in decision-making is required or volunteered, it is essential administrators provide for it. Inviting involvement is best, of course. Ways to involve people are endless. Some are "formal," others informal. Both equally essential. Although employee advisory committee, staff meetings and in-service training are described at length because their format must be "managed" to be effective, impromptu sessions in the coffee shop or teachers lounge and brief encounters at water fountain, parking lot or mail room are also viable vehicles for communication. **Don't pass up an opportunity.**

Employee advisory committees are the most formal involvement arrangements made by school districts with effective internal communications programs. Establishing such a committee to monitor the internal relations program has already been described. Staff advisory committees can also be organized to determine the direction of a number of other aspects of the educational system: curriculum, textbooks, school calendar, employment practices, student and community relations, budget and finance, facilities, and discipline are a few.

Important considerations when forming advisory committees include:

1. **Representation.** Make sure all interested employee groups and management are represented, and all probable points of view. Include representation by groups known to disagree with the status quo.
2. **Legitimacy.** Do not ask people to serve until channels are cleared to insure their work will be considered and acted upon. Value the committee's work and use it to effect change.

In large school systems, develop "networks" for maximum involvement. Spring Branch School District, Houston, Texas, Mary Kay Coleman, Internal Communications Director, operates a model staff advisory committee system for improving education.

Called PDC (Program Development Council), the network submits recommendations, implements ideas, and resolves curriculum problems. Besides curriculum improvement, the Council exists to improve communication between teachers at different schools and at all grade levels, and to improve communication between teachers and administrators.

The network includes Individual School Building Councils with representatives of all types of school employees meeting to discuss their school's instructional program and submitting recommendations to Curriculum Sub Councils.

Created by selecting representatives from many schools and categorized by disciplines taught, Curriculum Sub Councils review individual building council requests and use them to determine curriculum change proposals recommended for review by the Program Development Council. All Curriculum Sub Councils are represented on the PDC which may: (a) recommend an item to the school administration—and board—for implementation; (b) study the suggestion in greater detail; (c) return the suggestion to the sub council without action or with disapproval—and in either case, with an **explanation** of the PDC's position.

A Model Employee Advisory Committee program in Pasadena, Texas, schools is less formal in nature. According to Director Richard Smith, "Internal advisory committees in Pasadena open up the district to two-way communication. Employees welcome opportunities to "productively" sound off and be heard by administrators. Administrators suffer less isolation when the staff perceives **someone** (and more important: someone who can **do something**) cares."

Says Smith, "Formal advisory committee formats provide avenues for identifying legitimate problems. Meetings should be informal enough to encourage expression of annoying irritations so they can be contained. It is part of the human condition that little things are more annoying than big ones. By welcoming all suggestions and criticizing none, creativity can be tapped and all possibilities for solutions pursued."

Administrators in Pasadena use advisory committee meetings to send up "trial balloons" to secure feedback early in the decision-making process. Committee membership includes students and teachers charged with the responsibility of (1) listening to their peers so they can fairly represent them, (2) communicating concerns, and (3) relaying information exchanged during meetings back to their own group.

A check list for effective staff advisory committees:

1. Make sure the superintendent is committed to an "If I don't know, I'll find out" approach.
2. Let committee members know their contribution is important.
3. The presence of too many "administrative authorities" impedes spontaneous exchange.
4. Keep notes of meetings for follow-up.
5. Avoid seating the superintendent "at the head of the class."
6. Supply meetings' calendar and frequent reminders to members.
7. Publicize committee members' names.
8. Recognize committee members' work afterwards with certificates of appreciation and a thank you note from the board.
9. Place the responsibility for committee decisions squarely on members. In this way, action is taken **by employees, not done to them** by administrators.
10. Don't treat employees like they're taking up the boss's time!

Advisory committees are best organized by topic, so employees most interested in a particular problem can work to solve it. They are usually ad hoc in nature, dissolving upon completion of the specific task.

Staff meetings, on the other hand, are organized by office, department, or school; are more frequent, and involve all staff members in the building.

Call the roll. Requiring attendance at staff meetings: (1) emphasizes the importance of the meeting as a communications tool; (2) insures all staff members are receiving the same information; (3) recognizes information needs of everyone (it is as important for the cafeteria manager to know the 5th grade is going on a field trip as for the librarian); and (4) avoids creating morale problems by insuring equal participation. (There's "trouble in River City" if the music teacher or coach are regularly excused.)

Whether planning advisory, staff or inservice training meetings, select the time and place sensibly. Vary times so all employees can attend or repeat the same meeting twice, offering a choice of times and dates. Are you consistently denying participation to the custodian who works the 3-11 p.m. shift by always scheduling meetings at 8 a.m.? Cancel regular meetings occasionally, when employees are especially busy. Don't set inservice training the same day tests are due to be graded.

Move meeting sites around. In their zeal to select meeting sites for the comfort and convenience of staff members, planners miss an opportunity to develop pride in people—"Pride in workplace." No school system is so large that it is prohibitive to schedule one science meeting at North High School, the next at South High. People delight in preparing for company and showing off their surroundings. They also appreciate not having to host all the meetings all the time. Continually scheduling events at one location may also create an adverse employee relations effect if the school with the most meetings becomes known as the "preferred" place to work. Don't let showcase schools breed jealousy in the system. Staff members benefit from cross-visitations, learning how others have utilized or decorated a work space, for example.

Staff inservice training sessions will help to develop better internal communications and increase employee involvement. Tips for staff inservice include:

1. Establish advisory committees so employees can help plan their own training.
2. Tailor programs to staff needs.

3. Bring in "big names" staff members will respect and believe. Outside experts can say the same things as school administrators, but appear to have more credibility.

4. Invite staff to train themselves.* Idea swap shops are popular, productive, prompt peer respect, and train employees to assume leadership roles.

5. Provide answers through inservice to staff members' questions.

6. Present the "big picture." Employees naturally are most concerned about the problems they face daily. The concept of an entire system is difficult, but essential, to convey.

7. Discuss, don't dictate. Explanations offered in conversation with immediate provision for feedback are more satisfactory than directives.

8. Tell employees about management's problems. Coaches hearing the athletic director explain the intricacies of complying with league rules will begin to understand the problems and be less critical.

9. Inservice training provides opportunities to "do something nice" for employees. Ask the PTA to serve lunch. Conduct meetings in a retreat setting or on a college campus for a change of pace.

10. Provide cross-training opportunities.

*Administrators can't always let staff members plan their own training. If management depended upon employee-initiated inservice, good schools would get better, bad schools would get worse. Aggressive, successful school staffs tend to seek central office support, recognize the value of continuing education and request it. Regressive or apathetic faculty members don't perceive a need for assistance, and appear not to welcome "intrusion" by administrators, and seem to expect no benefits from inservice.

Continuing education need not be limited to inservice. When planning the school calendar, coordinate starting and ending dates with college and university summer sessions. Provide for leaves of absence. Cooperate with businesses in the community to provide summer employment job marts for nine- and ten-month employees. Set up procedures for communicating tutoring jobs, night school and summer school teacher vacancies, summer parks and recreation staff searches. Arrange for area colleges to schedule credit courses for advanced degrees after school **in school buildings.** Coordinate job swaps for vocational education teachers in the career field they teach.

Internal communication activities that are volunteered, natural (sincere), logical, and entered into with a mutual objective to improve job performance and job satisfaction for the purpose of improving education will reap benefits not only for the individual involved, but for the entire school district.

Develop a Crisis Communications Plan

Rumors are an unfortunate reality administrators must constantly combat—with facts. Particularly during times of crisis when emotions intensify, rumor control becomes a key component of the communications plan. Some schools and offices have staff lounge or coffee shop chalk boards for recording: (1) what I heard, (2) who's going to check it out, and (3) the facts.

Crisis, conflict and controversy can, when dealt with constructively, effect productive change. It invariably generates involvement. To secure support, administrators need to redirect emotional responses, take advantage of expressions of interest, and accept offers of aid.

CRISIS PLANNING

Northside (Texas) Independent School District

1. Use key staff and community communicators to dispel rumors.
2. Control the grapevine. Check rumors at the source.
3. Maintain an atmosphere of openness and trust. Be honest about mistakes. Provide plan for correcting weaknesses. Enlist aid. Fill requests for comments, interviews, photos, statistics.
4. Swiftly supply believable information—expect "officials" **not** to be believed (which is why a key communicators meeting works. They are the ones reporters talk to—the ones people believe.)

5. Set up avenues of communication before you see the likelihood of using them. Reap benefits of having already developed a cooperative relationship with the media over the long term.

6. Discuss with staff their role in crisis situations. Identify a line of spokespersons—an order of who will speak when first spokesperson is not available. Outline and assign administrative duties.

7. Pull students off the phones (for duration of crisis).

8. Don't say what you "think"—only what you know.

9. Rein in emotional involvement—yours—and be aware of its predominance in others.

10. Provide a press room (crisis communications center). Locate a room with phones separate from office of person in charge (principal's office) but "on the scene" of the crisis. Assign a staff member to remain there who knows what's going on and is in touch with both principal and media.

11. Take initiative with media where possible. You're better off going to them than vice-versa.

12. Be willing to share information but don't take a definite stand when all the facts aren't in. Emphasize what is NOT yet known as well as what is known. (see 8 above)

13. Emphasize with media and staff your understanding of their ability to "help" handle the crisis by informing. From this you can inject your opinion on why some things will not be helpful. Thank them for their cooperation and resist rapping publicly the ones who weren't helpful.

14. Announce a schedule of times when district spokespersons will meet the media—on the hour, on the half hour—but if you get new information they're seeking, don't wait until scheduled time to provide it.

15. If it becomes necessary to set ground rules limiting reporter access to the scene (building), enforce them without favoritism. Expect efforts to circumvent the rules will succeed—a good argument for not attempting to limit access in the first place.

16. Avoid use of a full-blown press conference. A few reporters at a time informally is the way they prefer it and the part they will "believe" anyway.

17. Make sure key "internal" staff members have telephone numbers with unlisted phone numbers, private lines, etc.

18. Use a P.A. system or bullhorn to address crowds —have one available. Provide administrators radio communication equipment.

19. Remember anything you say will be "for the record." Phone conversations may be taped—a good idea when possible to also tape from your end.

20. Explain to reporters **why** you won't provide certain information (because you don't want to violate privacy rights of anyone involved, hinder investigations, etc.)

21. If a reporter becomes a problem, explain why you are having difficulty communicating. (I can't answer that now but if you'll let me get back to you in 30 minutes, I can.)

22. Consider use of all conceivable communications tools: telephone trees, bulletins, "hot line" phones, paid advertising, posted notices, district-wide mail-outs.

23. Decisions **not** to cooperate with the media should be only made as a last resort—and then, by the superintendent.

Television, Radio, Newspapers and Magazines

Reporting education news is a major responsibility (and income-producer) for television and radio stations, newspapers and magazines. News reporters, when informing their viewers, listeners and readership about schools, will also be **informing school staff,** securing information **from staff,** and generating news **about staff.**

Often reporters can do some of the internal communicating **for** administrators, recognizing and rewarding staff members while reporting on their activities. Look for opportunities to provide reporters with human interest features about employees as well as students. Help people recognize an "angle," or a local approach to a national news story, and to cooperate with the news media. Provide inservice training in media relations for all employees and publish a ready-reference handbook for staff.

Send copies of news releases and news articles about employees to the employee, with a note to the "newsmaker" from the superintendent or school board.

Television, the most cost-effective communications vehicle available to school administrators, has not yet been fully utilized. Work closely with TV station public service and news personnel to arrange interviews with school staff members and students and news coverage of school programs. You can also borrow or purchase copies of video tapes of these programs for use in inservice training, new staff orientation, and reports to parents and the community.

Success Breeds Success

Effective employee performance depends largely upon the satisfaction staff members experience at work. Administrators can —and must—recognize and reward competence. Opportunities abound to commend employees. Great achievements and small, day-to-day successes, hailed by special ceremonies or simple "thank you" notes open communications channels and pave the way for improved employee relations.

Invent awards and enter employees in existing contests. "This Is Your Life" programs are popular with students and staff. "Cook of the Month," "Custodian, Teacher or Clerk of the Week" may be featured on bulletin boards, in the daily newspapers or school district newsletters. If the community's Junior Chamber of Commerce solicits nominations for "Young Man of the Year," nominate a school employee. Publicize the district's candidate for the award. Because of the unpredictable nature of news space from day to day, the nominees may get as much coverage in the local media as the winners. It is an honor for employees to be nominated.

A number of national education associations annually select an American to be recognized for contributions to education, asking the winner, in turn, to recognize the teacher most influential in his/her life. A similar award can be adapted by local school sys-

tems. The Lincoln (Neb.) Public Schools selects distinguished community members for recognition who are products of the Lincoln system. An element of competition is added by first printing school yearbook pictures of the person and asking readers to guess their identity.

Recognition may simply be "noticing" people; letting staff members know you "care." Send "Happy Secretaries Week" cards, birthday and get well cards. Take a secretary to lunch or arrange for parents to prepare buffets for teacher inservice days. Although the possibilities may be limited by time and money, inexpensive gifts and brief, hand-written notes or quick phone messages are equally effective. Research indicates people today do not necessarily respond negatively to mass, machine-produced communication. A form letter carefully worded to express real appreciation "to all who helped pass the finance issue" is better than nothing.

School board meetings are an appropriate forum for publicly recognizing employees. Set aside a specific place on the agenda for recognition and awards, and adopt board policies for length and nature of presentations. Certificates to cover any occasion may be printed and presented at this time. (See Appendix E for a sample certificate.)

Chapter 3
Evaluation of Your Program

Although all the suggestions in this guide were successful where they were used, all will not necessarily work for each reader. Successful application depends on fully understanding your staff in your system in a given time frame.

If employees are aware of school programs and achievements, if they feel comfortable in performance of their jobs and participate in decision-making, it will show. So much human contact occurs in the operation of a school system that administrators will ultimately "hear" the staff member who says "I don't know" or "I was asked, but the school board went ahead and did what they had planned to do in the first place."

To evaluate your internal communications program conduct formal or informal opinion polls; provide suggestion boxes and questionnaires; compile information from personal contacts, key communicators' meetings, telephone log studies and personnel office reports. Measure success by analyzing your information and report it to administrators, the board of education and staff.

Compile statistics to help determine the gravity of complaints. If a school system with a staff of 3,000 employees and 30,000 students—one phone call to central office information staff could represent 25 people having the same concern, but who didn't call!

Evaluation should be an ongoing process. When you have identified something that works, you need to go a step further and find out "why it works." Ask questions constantly and listen carefully. Continue to rely on research techniques, but don't discount your own so-called "gut feelings"—intuition.

Administrators who constantly keep trying to improve their internal communication programs will do so. There will be no internal communication program failures when evaluation and

reassessment systems are an integral part of the process. Employee relations fail only when there is no "program."

A lesson about the importance of a strong internal communication program can be learned from the media. Crack news reporters, seeking to get to the "nitty-gritty" in an education news story, may attend a formal press conference and take notes on the "official version" presented. But they will afterwards go to their so-called "inside sources"—school secretaries, teachers, students, etc.—to get the "real" facts. This "reality" alone emphasizes the need for administrators to develop strong internal communication systems to make certain that all staff members get the facts.

By improving **internal communications,** school administrators will improve their **external communications** automatically. In fact, experience implementing an internal communications program experience implementing and internal communication program can be adapted to develop similar involvement and dialogue with those external publics so critical to the success of all school districts.

Change in education is not always necessary. Sometimes the change needed is only in staff members' perception of what is taking place. Opinions are frequently quite different when formed by people who are armed with all the facts of any program, plan or situation.

Chapter 4
Summary

It suffices to say that today's school administrators have no other choice than to apply managerial skills toward the development of sound internal communication programs. Administrators cannot advocate participation in school district decision-making and joint efforts and then proceed to ignore or neglect any of these publics.

Internal publics comprise a large segment of any school community and are the most likely group to be "believed" by other residents when asked questions about the schools. This important group has the potential to be the most supportive and most knowledgeable segment of the community if involved as equal partners in a district's communication program.

By implementing effective internal communications programs, school administrators produce a high level of public confidence in their schools. Taxpayers will receive a fair return on their investments, community support will increase, and students will secure the education necessary to equip them to become contributing citizens in the American democracy.

APPENDIX A

BOARD POLICY

Westside Community Schools, District 66, Omaha, Neb.

Position: Director of Communications

To Whom Responsible: Superintendent

For Whom Responsible: Communications Department, administrators and staff members as superintendent's assignments designate

Main Function: To direct internal and external school-community relations programs for the school system

Responsibilities:

Administration

- To administer district wide functions as designated by the superintendent
- To develop and direct a planned, systematic program of communications
- To direct the district's communications program on a local, state and national basis, with major emphasis on communications within the district, communications between the student's school and home, and communications between the district and the community
- To serve as a communications liaison between the press and the superintendent and staff members
- To be knowledgeable of all major happenings within the district as a basis for accurate reporting and communicating
- To arrange for press coverage at all major functions of the district
- To organize and plan regular meetings for communication advisory group, made up of community leaders
- To maintain a working relationship with community leaders and community organizations, such as the Chamber of Commerce
- To serve as an advisor to the superintendent and as a member of the superintendent's administrative council
- To represent the school system in community, state and national functions, as requested by the superintendent

Staff Development

- To work with the director of staff development in developing and leading communication workshops for staff members, as needed and requested
- To provide staff development programs for the communications staff

Communications

- To manage the operation of the communication department with direct responsibility for department personnel, budget development, materials and equipment
- To manage the development and production of district publications for staff and community
- To direct the functions of the printing office for administrative, curriculum, and communication purposes
- To develop and maintain an effective working relationship with the news media
- To prepare news releases, organize news conferences and prepare informational programs
- To assist any staff member or group of employees to tell a story of what's happening educationally, by news story, slide presentation, speech, article, media announcement
- To be a consultant in organizing and conducting effective meetings and conferences

APPENDIX B

Current Trends in School Policies and Programs

Improving Communication

In attempting to improve communication skills, the Human Relations Department of the Nashville, Tenn., schools describes verbal and nonverbal communication and says:

"We live in a world of words.

"Words can cause us to flare up or be soothed.

"Words can make us angry or they can make us feel good.

"Words can cause us to kill or be killed.

"One cannot *NOT* communicate.

"Messages are sent in the following ways:

"1) Verbal communication. The words we use and the effect their meaning has on other people.

"2) Nonverbal communication which has to do with the way we act, how we think, how we feel and how other people read our thoughts, our actions and our attitudes. This is the communication that prompted such expressions as 'Actions speak louder than words' or 'What you do speaks so loudly I can't hear what you say.'

"The message sent may not be the message received. So teachers who want to be sure should:

"Repeat in your own words what you heard.

"Ask questions for clarification.

"Check to see if you understand the reaction your words have produced.

"Describe how you feel about what has been said."

National School Public Relations Association

APPENDIX C

Rapport Card

SCHOOL DISTRICT OF LANCASTER

225 W. Orange St., Lancaster PA 17604 Winter, 1978

We love a party as much as anyone else, and certainly the Wharton PTA party of February 23 to honor Willard W. Funk was as nice a bash as one could hope to attend. The slide tape production, "This is your Life, Willard Funk," was deeply moving and altogether appropriate.

During the time we have been at the District, Willard has always struck us as doing an outstanding job in the area of public relations and in his dealings with the media. His schools have never lacked for adequate space or coverage in the local newspapers.

From time to time, we have thought about recognizing those who merit recognition as doing an effective job of public relations for the District. Willard Funk certainly qualifies, and we hereby name him the first recipient of the "L & H Award" -- which may not mean much to Willard, but it does to us because whatever he does makes our job easier!

The above "award" is presently half seriously, half in jest, but it is with wholehearted sincerity that we add our congratulations and thanks to Willard along with all of those who honored him at the party.

Rapport Card is published by the Office of Information Services, Ext. 241.

A TALE OF THREE WOMEN

Jeanne Mowrer

Jeanne works directly with Dick Loerch in her job as Administrative Assistant for Business Affairs. Budgeting, financial planning, fiscal accounting, transportation, insurance policies, data processing, use of computer reports and some auditing all fall within the scope of her responsibilities.

Quite apart form the fanfare of the District's recent administrative reorganization, three women have moved into management positions. For Timi Sweeney, Jeanne Mowrer and Evelyn Nace, who have all been with the District for a number of years, life is no longer the same. Their promotions to administrative assistant positions have meant not only new responsibilities, but opportunities for growth and new learning experiences.

All three women find moving into management positions personally challenging. But each has had a different background and each expresses her reaction to her new role in a different way.

Evelyn, formerly Dr. Walker's secretary, has found that it's quite difficult to make the transition from being a secretary to becoming an administrator. "You're used to taking orders rather than being a decision-maker. You have to relearn how to

(Continued on Page 2)

Timi Sweeney

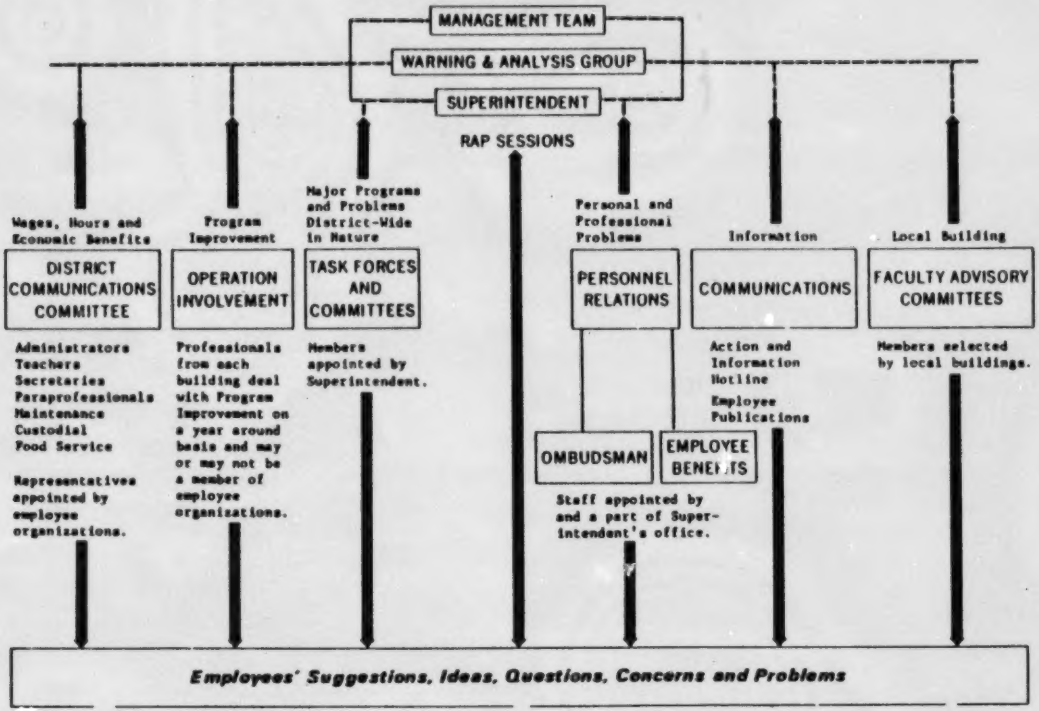
ESEA Title I is the main part of Timi's job as Administrative Assistant for Federal Programs. Budgets, compliance with federal regulations, and preparing for the continuing rounds of evaluations are all aspects of her job. Coordination, too, plays an important role -- with principals, parent advisory councils, administrators -- with anyone, in short, whose lives are touched by Title I funds.

Evelyn Nace

As Administrative Assistant for Personnel, Evelyn is responsible for record keeping on the professional and service staff, certification of the professional staff, and for the federal and state reports that are required. Presently, in conjunction with Paul Steffy, she is in the process of establishing guidelines and procedures for all District personnel.

COMMUNICATIONS MODEL

Shared Accountability and Decision Making



Northside Independent School District

San Antonio, Texas

The Board of Trustees

Presents to

This Certificate of

Distinguished Community Service

as a member of

_____

_____ Date

_____ Superintendent of Schools

_____ President, Board of Trustees

APPENDIX E

The main business of the National School Public Relations Association (NSPRA), formed in 1935, is to help bring about better citizen understanding of the objectives, accomplishments, and needs of schools. NSPRA's mission is to build support for education through responsible public relations and communication.

If the duties of your position call for communicating with the public or others in the field of education, NSPRA membership is a must for you. NSPRA member services include: *PARAGRAPHS* (member newsletter), Public Relations Resource Center, Research Assistance, PR Hotline Counseling Service, Personnel Clearinghouse, National Representation, reduced rates for members at NSPRA's annual National Seminar and a voluntary accreditation program. There are four categories of NSPRA membership: institutional, professional, associate, and student.

Other NSPRA Products, Services and Activities include: *EDUCATION USA, IT STARTS IN THE CLASSROOM* and *FEDERAL FUNDING ALERT* newsletters; workshops and consulting services; special publications and audiovisual materials.

To order additional titles of "*Basic School PR Guides,*" or to obtain information about NSPRA membership, products and services, contact: National School Public Relations Association, 1801 North Moore Street, Arlington, Virginia 22209, (703) 528-5840.